

WINTER DRIVING WOES

With the recent episode of severe weather, I feel this is the ideal time to remind everyone of winter driving safety tips. I'm sure there are many, myself included, who had never witnessed such large amounts of snow. [The WHAS-11 website stated more than 100 stranded travelers were rescued from their snowbound vehicles on I-64 Christmas Eve, and there were hours-long delays on I-65.](#) According to FEMA, the leading cause of death during winter storms is vehicle accidents. Preparing your vehicle for the winter season and knowing how to react if stranded or lost on the road are the keys to safe winter driving.

To decrease the risk of becoming stranded on a remote, country road or in the middle of a snow storm, you should make sure the following items are checked and in working condition on your vehicle: battery, antifreeze, wipers and windshield washer fluid and brakes. Make sure you have adequate tread on your all-weather radial tires. Don't decrease tire pressure to increase traction, the only thing this increases is wear on the tires. Chains and studded tires are legal in Indiana from October 1st - May 1st. Adding weight to the back of your vehicle may alter its handling capabilities. Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season, to prevent the gas line from freezing.

Keep a winter survival kit in your vehicle, containing the following items: Flashlight and extra batteries, first aid kit, necessary medications, blankets/sleeping bags, newspapers (for insulation), plastic bags (for sanitation), extra set of clothes, rain gear, small bag of sand or cat litter for generating traction under wheels, traction mats, small shovel, small tool kit, jumper cables, candle and matches, brightly colored cloth to use as a flag, canned fruits, nonelectric can opener, bottled water, supply of non-perishable high energy "munchies" (nuts, raisins and candy bars), windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal.

If you are planning a long trip, or even a short trip check the weather conditions. The Indiana State Police has a website, www.in.gov/isp/roadinfo/weather.html, where you can check Indiana road conditions or you may call 1-317-232-8298 from December 1st - April 1st.

[What do all the weather terms mean? A winter storm watch means severe winter weather may affect your area. A winter storm warning means severe winter weather conditions are on the way. A blizzard warning means large amounts of falling/blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 mph are expected for several hours. Wind chill is a calculation of how cold it feels outside when the effects of temperature and wind speed are combined. A strong wind combined with a temperature of just below freezing can have the same effect as a still air temperature about 35 degrees colder.](#)

Drive Defensively and according to road conditions: Let someone know the route of your travel. Wear your seatbelt at all times. If roads are hazardous you should try to travel during daylight hours. During the winter season you should dress warmly, wear layers of loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing. Have mittens, a cap and scarf available. Keep a cell phone with you.

Allow extra time to get where you're going. Clear all windows of ice and snow. Remove snow from hood, roof and lights. Slow steady starts prevent needless spinning of tires. Pavement is twice

as slippery at 32 degrees Fahrenheit as it is at 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Beware of bridges, underpasses, overpasses, shaded areas and intersections where ice is slow to melt. Driving slower increases traction. Avoid abrupt stops and starts, slow down gradually and keep wheels turning to avoid getting stuck. Use low beam headlights to decrease glare from ice. Wet pavement can cause hydroplaning at speeds as low as 35 mph. To regain control during a skid, release brakes and gently steer the car in the direction of skid. Don't tailgate, leave at least 2 car lengths per 10 mph you're traveling. When braking on ice apply gentle but firm pressure without locking brakes. Watch for pedestrians, poor visibility and slippery conditions provide hazardous walkways and crossings. Anticipate others' actions.

What should I do if I am trapped in my vehicle during a blizzard?

Stay in your automobile, it's the best protection you have. Do not leave your automobile to search for assistance, unless help is visible within 100 yards, you may become disoriented and lost in blowing and drifting snow. Hang a brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna. Occasionally run engine to keep warm, turn on the car's engine for about 10 minutes each hour. An idling car uses only 1 gallon of gas per hour. Run the heater when the car is running. Leave the dome light on at night to aid search parties. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow and open a downwind window slightly for ventilation, to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Do minor exercises to keep up circulation, clap hands and move arms and legs occasionally. Try not to stay in one position for too long. If there is more than one person in the car, take turns sleeping and huddle together for warmth. Use newspapers, maps and the removable car mats for added insulation.

Avoid overexertion as cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration. Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite. Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion. If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person slowly. Warm the person's trunk first, use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put the person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket. Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine in it or alcohol. Caffeine can cause the heart to beat faster and hasten the effects the cold has on the body. Alcohol can slow the heart and also hasten the ill effects of cold body temperatures. If you were not trapped and these symptoms developed you should seek medical attention immediately.

Information from this article was obtained in part from the FEMA website, www.fema.gov and Indiana State Police website, www.in.gov/isp.